EXPERTS SEARCH FOR EXPLOSIVE TRACES ON A321 PLANE FRAGMENTS — ANTI-TERRORIST COMMITTEE

News / Airlines

Russian experts have taken wipe samples from all the plane fragments and passengers' luggage to trace possible explosives.

The National **Anti-Terrorist Committee** deems it necessary to stop all Russian flights to Egypt until the causes of the A321 plane crash are established. Russian experts are taking wipe-samples from the **plane fragments** and passengers' luggage to trace possible **explosives**.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu; Chief of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff Vladimir Gerasimov; Mikhail Fradkov, head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, and Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev took part in an extraordinary meeting on Friday.

Alexander Bortnikov, head of the National Anti-Terrorist Committee and director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), explained that the meeting was taking place as part of investigation into the Kogalymavia's plane crash over the Sinai Peninsula to work out additional air traffic safety measures.

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Russian Emergencies Minister Vladimir Puchkov said that Russian experts had taken wipe samples from all the plane fragments and passengers' luggage to trace possible explosives. "The necessary samples have been taken from all the elements where traces of explosives can be found. All these samples have been delivered to Moscow where they are being studied and analyzed by top class experts with the help of state of the art modern equipment. I can tell you with full responsibility that if there are traces of explosives, they will be found without fail," Puchkov said adding that all the findings would be published.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee will work out additional air traffic safety measures following the Russian plane crash in Egypt, Alexander Bortnikov, the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), said.

"Today we are holding an extraordinary meeting of the committee on the investigation of the Kogalymavia plane crash above Sinai [peninsula] in order to outline additional air traffic security measures," Bortnikov told a meeting of the National Anti-Terrorist Committee.

All the agencies concerned that have joined the probe should continue investigating the crash causes. "We should receive absolutely objective and confirmed data concerning what caused the plane crash. It is necessary both for the needs of investigation and for informing the public. The investigation should be thorough and should last for as long as it is necessary," Bortnikov stressed.

"So long as we do not establish the true causes of what happened, I think it would be reasonable to stop Russian aviation flights to Egypt. It concerns tourism in the first place," Bortnikov said.

He also called for active interaction with the Egyptian authorities in joint investigation into the plane crash causes.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has agreed with Interstate Aviation Committee recommendations to suspend air links with Egypt until the causes of the A321 plane crash have been identified, presidential press-secretary Dmitry Peskov has told the media.

He said FSB Head Alexander Bortnikov had briefed the president on these recommendations after an IAC meeting on Friday.

"The head of state agreed," Peskov said.

"Putin has instructed the government to look into the mechanisms of implementing these IAC recommendations and ensure the return home of Russian citizens," he said.

Also, Putin asked to establish cooperation with Egypt for ensuring the safety of air links, he added.

There are no confirmed statistics as to how many Russian holiday-makers are staying in Egypt at the moment. Several days ago the commercial director of a large Russian tour operator, Tez Tour, Aleksandr Burtin, told TASS that an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 tourists from Russia might be spending a holiday near Sharm el-Sheikh.

"It's high season down there," Burtin said.

The A321 plane belonging to Russia's air company Kogalymavia was en route from Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt to St. Petersburg in Russia (flight KGL 9268) when it crashed over the Sinai Peninsula early on October 31. The plane fell near El Hasna populated locality 100 km to the south of Al-Arish, the administrative center of the North Sinai Governorate (province). All the 224

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people onboard, including 217 passengers and the 7-member crew, died. The passengers, most of whom were Russians, also included four Ukrainians and one citizen of Belarus.

Three countries, including Britain, Ireland and the Netherlands, have suspended flights to the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh in recent days. London explained its move by serious suspicions that the Russian plane crash could have been caused by a bomb detonation onboard.

In the meanwhile, the Russian Center of Forensic Medicine said earlier this week that Russian and Egyptian experts did not find any traces of explosives on the dead passengers' bodies during a preliminary examination. Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi criticized the terrorist act version in an interview with The Daily Telegraph that came out on November 4. He said that such conclusions were premature and were not based on any authentic facts.

A Russian source in the technical commission, which is investigating the Airbus A321 crash, said in turn that any information, which leaks into the media from sources allegedly close to the investigation, was bad for the investigation.

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